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Foreign Records on the Malay Archipelago Through Vietnam's Persepctive

Ku Boon Dar, Ph.D



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Ku Boon Dar, Ph. D (Malaya)
History Section
School of Distance Education
Universiti Sains Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to trace the early history of the Malay Archipelago with Vietnam based on the records of Vietnam’s emissaries. A specific focus is given to the 19th century due to the dynamic political and economic relations with the Western powers, witnessed in the maritime activities of the Malay Archipelago. The developments of capitalism and trade encouraged the Western colonialist to tap into the wealth of the Malay Archipelago’s natural resources. In addition, Vietnam sent about 40 missions abroad in its diplomatic effort to establish ties with foreign countries including the states in the Malay Archipelago. However, the records of the voyages of Vietnam’s envoys on the lives of the people in the Malay Archipelago have been partially explored by scholars. They are rarely mentioned in historical resources. Therefore, this paper will explore the records of *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* (A Summary Report of Sea Journey) and *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ki Luoc* (An Account of Journey to the West) which were written by Phan Huy Chu and Ly Van Phuc respectively. The paper suggests that both sources can be utilised by the local scholars to reconstruct the history of the Malay Archipelago which has been heavily dependent on Western sources.

Keyword: Malay Archipelago, Vietnamese emissaries, Phan Huy Chu, Ly Van Phuc, Socio-economy

INTRODUCTION

During the 60s, scholars such as Harry J. Benda (1962) and John Bastin (1960) have called upon researchers to marginalize the historical writings of the colonial era which judge the local history only through the Europe-centric perspective. According to John R.W. Smail (1961), Europe-centric is defined as Europeans having the perspective of glorifying the western history due to their background of being educated according to the European cultures as well as it being part of the European thoughts. In addition, Europe-centric gave a bias evaluation and focused more on the roles of the Europeans that the views of Asians were not given adequate attention. Thus, they suggest that writings on Southeast Asia should be anchored on the history of the locals by studying the characteristics of the internal elements of countries in Southeast Asia. The reconstruction of the writing has been

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described by John R.W. Smail (1961) as ‘autonomous history’ - which emphasizes the natural elements, internal growth and continuity in the history of Southeast Asia. According to John R.W. Smail, separating between Asia-centric and Europe-centric is no longer valid because we are all members of a culture or civilization of the universal world although the culture is more influenced by the West. Thus, in the form of autonomous history, the role of the West is only taken into account as part of the external relations between the countries of Southeast Asia with the Western powers concerned. Smail suggests that the study of the history of Southeast Asia should focus on the continuation of research in the movements of the local population and social structure and culture of the local community. Each event should be reviewed as an extension of the pre-colonial and not merely as a reaction to the West. Following the debate, the issue of periodization of Southeast Asian history was raised.

Therefore, since the 19th century, the debate between the two groups of historians continues with: the first adhering to the story of history as a series of events; and while the second aspires to develop new history and to look for patterns of history with the theory of “laws” as it is being currently developed in economics, sociology, psychology and others - a dialogue which until now is still a continuous debate. New History suggests an interdisciplinary approach using a variety of other auxiliary. It is inclusive in nature whereby it covers all segments of society in various settings such as socially, economically, politically and culturally. Therefore, the scope and the writing of a new history are more thematic which means that the history is issue-oriented instead of an event or sequence of events.

Throughout the 1950s, the historiography of Malaysia was constantly discussed when the country’s independence was declared. Thus, there was instigation that the history of Malaya should be rewritten in a new perspective. Khoo Kay Kim (1992) alleged that many misunderstood the meaning of a new perspective. To them, a new perspective meant that during the time of British colonial, the framework of historical analysis is said to have greatly contributed to the development of economic, social and political situation in the country of Malaya while now, historians should expose the negative aspects of the colonial era. In actual fact, according to Khoo Kay Kim, it never happened. Instead, he believed that after the Second World War (1939 – 1945), the writing pattern of historians experienced a slight change in order to balance the bias perception of one party.² For instance, K.G. Tregoning, the pioneering scholar of Malayan and Sabah history tried to reject the colonial aspects in his writings. He considered the presence of the Portuguese and the Dutch as irrelevant. Instead, he focused on after the fall of Malacca Sultanate in the 16th century, Aceh in the 17th century and Bugis during the 18th century.³

In the early stages, the researchers were faced with various problems when they were trying to write history from the perspective of the native due to constraints of local resources. This is due to the fact that local resources are scattered without any initiative from the local researchers to utilize it. However, the most challenging issues were that the local sources from this region were perceived as less authoritative and also due to language barrier among researchers. As a result, the local records were forgotten and rarely utilised fully by the researchers. Furthermore, by 19th century, the country witnessed the arrival and

² Khoo Kay Kim (1992). “Perkembangan Pendidikan Sejarah Di Malaysia,” in *Sejarah Dalam Pendidikan*. Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, Cawangan Wilayah Persekutuan, p. 14.

³ Wheatley, P. 1961. *The Golden Khersonese: Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula before A.D. 1500*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, p. 5.



colonization by the Western countries namely the British, Dutch, Spanish and French in the region which intensified and was suffocating. Thus, the western historical sources were hailed, as though it is the only source that can interpret the history of the archipelago.

From this point of view, the paper attempts to demonstrate that the resources from this region, specifically from Vietnam are indeed capable of filling in the void. This is based on the observation of Vietnam's resources which is able to sketch the history of the archipelago in the 19th century, particularly the aspects of political relations, and socio-economic as well as its cultural link with the country. Finally, the historical sources provides an opportunity to display description of how the archipelago was seen from certain places in the region rather than the perspective from the deck of a ship, the ramparts of the fortress and the high gallery of the trading house as affirmed by J.C van Leur (1995).⁴

The initial relationship between the histories of the Malay Archipelago with Vietnam was always dominated by the relation of Campa Kingdom with countries in Malay Archipelago. When Minh Mang (1820-1841) took power from his father, Gia Long as Vietnam's Emperor in 1820, he immediately sent the court officials with the aim to further strengthen diplomatic ties with the states in Malay Archipelago, known by the Vietnamese as Do-ba (Java).⁵ During the reign of Minh Mang, he successfully sent nine delegates to the Malay Archipelago in the years 1825, 1832, 1832/33, 1836, 1836-37, 1839, 1840 and 1844. Among the focus areas of the states in the Malay Archipelago included eight envoys to - Giang Luu - Ba [Batavia], six envoys to Tan - gia - ba [Singapore] while two envoys were sent to each Tan - Lang du [Penang] (1832-1835) , Samarang (1839-1840) and Luzon (1832 , 1835). Amongst all of the voyages of Vietnam's envoy to the Malay Archipelago, the most famous was that of the delegates are all mission visited Batavia, six visited Singapore, two went to Penang (1832 & 1835) respectively.⁶ Thus, this article intends to reflect on some of the reports and travel impression written by these emissaries regarding the Malay Archipelago as well as to review the factors behind the passion of Minh Mang on sending the emissaries to the Malay Archipelago.

MISSION TO THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO: FINDING THE REASON

Upon replacing Gia Long on the throne, Minh Mang realised that Vietnam had to free itself from the grasp of the French and so his majesty sought other Western powers in order to balance out the French's grasp on Vietnam. This is due to the fact that there were a number of French officials in the Hue palace who had been serving his majesty's father, Gia Long (1802-1820) before him. These French officials served as advisors in his majesty's administration, amongst whom the most influential were Jean Marie Dayot (1759-1809)

⁴ J. C. Van Leur (1955). *Indonesian Trade and Society*. The Hague: W. van Hoeve, p. 261.

⁵ Do-ba, Tra-Oa or Cha-va were the term most frequently used to describe the people or state in the Malay World regardless of the places of origin. These terms are Vietnamese phonetic variants of the term Java. Nguyen The Anh. 1996. "Indochina and the Malay World: A Glimpse on Malay-Vietnamese Relations to the Mid-Nineteenth Century." *Asia Journal* (Seoul), 3(1):199-120.

⁶ Phan Huy Chu, *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* (Records of Maritime Route), VNv. 2656 and VHv 2071 17 conserved in the Vien Nghien Cuu Han-Nom (Institute of Han-Nom Studies), Hanoi, Vietnam. For this paper, I have used the edition in *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* "Recit sommaire d'un voyage en mer (1833): un emissaire Vietnamien a Batavia," traduit et presente par Phan Huy Le, Claudine Salmon & Ta Trong Hiep (1994). Paris: Association Archipel. pp. 22-23.



who commandeered the navy and Oliver de Puymanel (1768-1799) who led the army. Gia Long's successful founding of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) in 1802 in Vietnam following the fall of the Tay Son rebellion, was made possible through the aid provided by a French priest, Pigneau de Behaine (1741-1799). Pigneau had recruited volunteers and military forces from the French government to help Gia Long conquer the Vietnamese throne. As a result, Gia Long's administration had included French officials from the very beginning.⁷

Thus, the focus fell on the Malay Archipelago where western powers such as the British and the Dutch were actively exploring the trade routes. The waters of the Malay Archipelago became rife with upheaval due to the rapid growth in capitalist trade in the British and Dutch countries. Minh Mang knew that the trade restrictions which resulted from China's closed-door policy in the 19th century prompted British capitalists to push their government into taking direct action on the Chinese empire.⁸

Nevertheless, Minh Mang's upbringing and education which were influenced by Confucianism restricted him from openly establishing any diplomatic ties with the Western powers. Therefore, Minh Mang's policy is similar to China's administrative pattern which was based on their closed-door policy.⁹ Minh Mang's refrain from establishing any form of relationship is evident in his actions as soon as he replaced his father, Gia Long, as Vietnam's emperor. Diplomatic and trade missions deployed by the Western powers in the early years of Minh Mang's administration such as Captain John White of the United States in 1820; Louis XVIII of France in 1821; and John Crawfurd of the British East India Company in 1821, failed to secure any relationship with Vietnam.¹⁰ Minh Mang only agreed to buying cannons, firearms, military uniforms and books published from the West. In addition, the Western emissaries' failure to secure any treaty with Minh Mang, such as John Crawfurd (1783-1868), was due to the fact that Minh Mang felt that these emissaries were acting within their own individual capacity and not as official representatives of the British government. Minh Mang refused to sign any trade treaties with the Western powers as he believed that they would try to control Vietnam through biased trade policies.¹¹

Minh Mang was aware of the possible risks and threats posed by the Western powers should they successfully infiltrate the South China Sea. Moreover, the Opium War which broke out from 1839-1842 between the British and China worried Minh Mang's administration.¹² This is because Opium War was a clash between two cultures: East and West. The result was a difference of perception between China and Britain on trade, foreign

⁷ Keith, W. Taylor. (2013). *A History of the Vietnamese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 384-385. See also Mark, W. McLeod (1991). *The Vietnamese Response to French Intervention, 1862-1874*. New York: Praeger Publishers. p. 9-11.

⁸ Alexander, B. Woodside (1988). *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University. p. 280.

⁹ Sun Jian Dang (2001). *Yuenan ruanchao ming ming shiqi de duiwai guanxi* (Vietnam's Foreign Policy during the reign of Minh Mang). Master Thesis. Henan: Zhengzhou University.

¹⁰ Oscar C. (2000). *The Last Emperors of Vietnam: From Tu Duc to Bao Dai*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p. 4.

¹¹ D. J. M. Tate (1971). *The Making of Modern South-East Asia: The European Conquest*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, p. 458.

¹² *Minh Menh Chinh Yeu* (hereafter, MMCY), A57. Vol. 17. Conserved in the Vien Nghien Cuu Han-Nom (Institute of Han-Nom Research), Hanoi, Vietnam.



relations, judiciary and legislature that has sparked a war between the two powers as stated by Chaurasia. (2004, 60)

Hence, in order to protect Vietnam from Western invasions, Minh Mang also felt that strengthening the country's defences should be a priority in Vietnam's agenda for political survival. Thus it became his administration's top priority to reinforce the Vietnamese armada. Minh Mang's view of armed forces is that while it does not matter much if hundreds of soldiers are not sent to the battle field, the armed forces must never be neglectfully unprepared.¹³ His majesty was aware that the Western powers had successfully monopolised the maritime route in the South China Sea.¹⁴ Therefore, Minh Mang had actively increased the strength and training of his armada in order to discourage the Western powers from preying on Vietnam, which had adopted a trade isolation policy. Minh Mang had enhanced Vietnam's coastal defences by building more strategic fortresses along the Gulf of Tonkin. His majesty had hoped that Vietnam would stand supreme in that maritime and thus strike a balance between the Western and Vietnamese forces.¹⁵ The construction of fortresses on the islands of Phu-quoc and Poulo Condore in 1833 and 1836 are the testimony of Vietnam's efforts in strengthening its armada and balancing out the Western powers in the South China Sea.¹⁶

At the same time, turbulent power struggles and geopolitical overlap continue to plague the Dutch and the British, particularly within the Straits of Malacca. This situation made Minh Mang realise that as a country surrounded by clusters of islands and gulfs, Vietnam had to learn how the Western powers conquered and managed their colonies in the Malay Archipelago. The Nguyen rule, faced with increased pressure from the French to allow them economic access to Vietnam's resources and establish a protectorate, was keen to learn more about European political intentions in Asia.¹⁷ This was especially important in light of the rapidly forming trade relations between Vietnam and Singapore. Hence Minh Mang had sent forth his court officials, known as *Cach Quan*, to investigate the political situation, socio-economy, and colonies of the Westerners in the Malay Archipelago especially the Straits Settlements.¹⁸

Minh Mang also hoped that the Vietnamese armada's capacity would be fully optimised, especially in terms of their navigational skills and techniques while treading the treacherous waves and fierce winds of the South China Sea. Minh Mang's ambition was to build a powerful navy fleet which would command the respect of all in the South China Sea.¹⁹ The *hoc banh tay sua bo* policy, which means learning foreign [Western] languages, technologies and skills, were instilled into Vietnam's defence agenda. This policy allowed Vietnam to receive all manner of knowledge from the West while keeping a closed-door

¹³ *MMCY*, A57. Vol. 17.

¹⁴ *DNTLCB*, 157

¹⁵ Lee Kuei-Min (2016). “Nguyen Dynasty Emperor Minh Mang's (1820–841) Reform and Operation of Vietnam's Coastal Defence.” *Asia-Pacific Research Forum*, No. 62: 112–113.

¹⁶ *DNTLCB*, Vol. 106, p 3831. See also Nguyen Khac Vien (2002). *Vietnam: A Long History*. Hanoi: Gioi Publishers, p. 103.

¹⁷ Nora Taylor, 134.

¹⁸ Yu Xiang Dong (2008). *Gudai yuenan di Haiyang yishi* (Maritime consciousness of ancient Vietnam). Ph. D dissertation, Xiamen: University of Xiamen, p.163-164.

¹⁹ *MMCY*, Vol: 14, p.4b.



policy (*be mon toa cang*) that called for closing the gates and locking the harbours on forming treaties with them.²⁰

Minh Mang took great interest in the progress of the Vietnamese armada. From the construction of the ships right up to the navy training stage, his majesty would observe with enthusiasm. It was recorded that Minh Mang had decreed that the Vietnamese armada should be fully armed before sailing for the Malay Archipelago. It was a test of the ships' sophistication and effectiveness.²¹ Nevertheless, the deployment of these emissaries for the purpose of training and trading was only a ruse meant to disguise their true purpose of gathering intelligence on the size and strength of the Western defences in the Malay Archipelago.²²

One of the delegates, Phan Huy Chu wrote of his journey to Batavia and Singapore in a book entitled *Hai Trinh Chi Luo* (The Summary Record of a Sea Journey) which helped us understand the perception and understanding of Vietnam on Malay Archipelago during the beginning of the 19th century. The content was very valuable as it describes the changes done by Western colonisation in both places.²³ Another literary work relevant to the Malay Archipelago by Ly Van Phuc (1782-1840) entitled *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ky Luoc* (Accounts of journey to the West) tells of Vietnam's delegation to India in 1830 while he also had the opportunity to sail to the Straits Settlement. Divided into fourteen categories, the text covered on cultures, diets, customs, housing, transportation, currency, use of calendar and others.²⁴

HAI TRINH CHI LUOC (THE SUMMARY RECORD OF A SEA JOURNEY)

Phan Huy Chu (1782-1840) came from a renowned family formed through marital ties between Phan and Ngo, which are two main clans in Vietnam. He was born in 1782 in Thuy Khe Village in Son Tay Province, which is approximately 26 kilometres south-west of Hanoi. His father, Phan Huy Ich, had briefly served in the Tay Son reign. He was given a variety of assignments in Thanh Hoa and was named first secretary in the new government's Ministry of Finance. This cast a shadow over Phan Huy Chu's career during the early days of the Nguyen Dynasty administration (1802-1945). This was due to the fact that the Nguyen Dynasty, which was founded by the Gia Long, had successfully overthrown the Tay Son reign. Hence, during his initial ten years of public service, Phan Huy Chu spent more of his time on research and writing. In 1819, he published *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi* (An Accounts on the Institutions of Successive Dynasties). The research was a narrative of Vietnam's history encompassing its geography, positions in the royal court, laws, military,

²⁰ Liam C. Kelly. “Batavia through the Eyes of Vietnamese Envoys.” *Explorations in Southeast Asian Studies*. A Journal of the Southeast Asian Studies Student Association, Vol.2 (1): 2.

²¹ *MMCY*, Vol: 14, p.4b.

²² Various goods were traded including exports such as sugar, bronze, bronze shillings, and elephant tusks. Meanwhile, imports included tin ore, lead, sulphur, rifles and fabric. See Nguyen The Anh. 1996. “Indochina and the Malay World: A Glimpse on Malay-Vietnamese Relations to the Mid-Nineteenth Century.” *Asia Journal* (Seoul), 3(1): 271-273.

²³ *Ibid.* pp. 177-209.

²⁴ Ly Van Phuc, *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ky Luoc* (1830, hereafter *THKVKL*). AB. 243 and MF. 338 conserved in the Vien Nghien Cuu Han-Nom (Institute of Han-Nom Studies), Hanoi.



and foreign affairs. His research won the acclaim of Emperor Minh Mang and led to his appointment as *Quoc Tu Giam* (ceremonial officer) in 1820.²⁵

In the next thirteen years, Phan Huy Chu dabbled in politics and in the process, experienced ups and downs in his political career. In 1824, he was nominated to lead an envoy to China as office of diplomatic to purchase books and paintings in order to better understand the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911). His career took a turn for the worst upon returning from a mission to China in 1832 when Minh Mang demoted him along with two other ambassadors, Mac Van on and Truong Hao Hop. This harsh punishment was meted out by the Minh Mang for their alleged failure to fully narrate the events which unfolded in China. Phan Huy Chu's views were not received favourably by Minh Mang who accused him of using his trips for his own scientific curiosity rather than as a service to the emperor. As a results, he was cashiered together with others.²⁶ This was an act born out of the Minh Mang's desperation to discover the situation and uprising brewing in China after the arrival of the British; in particular, the events leading up to the Opium War (1839-1942).²⁷

This blow to his career did not dampen Phan Huy Chu's spirits who continued to forge his way forward by volunteering to lead the delegation to Singapore and Batavia the following year in order to redeem his political career. In his opinion, this was his chance to prove his ability to fulfil the Minh Mang's orders with dedication. He believed that his experience in research and writing would enable him to produce a complete narrative in the future.²⁸ This was realised when he successfully compiled his notes and observations of the Malay Archipelago in a report entitled *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* (The Summary Record of a Sea Journey). Not only did the publication of *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* restore Phan Huy Chu's honour as a distinguished scholar, it also successfully detailed information on the Western powers, specifically their socio-economy and socio-culture in the Malay Archipelago. His observations of the island of Pulau Condore, the Gulf of Siam, the Malay Peninsula and the port of Singapore leading up to Batavia provide for very interesting reading. Phan Huy Chu clearly states in the introduction that for quite a long time, the Vietnamese literati were totally ignorant of their southern neighbours, referred to as the Malay Archipelago. He stated that,

The literati who accomplished these missions have greatly benefited all of the strange things they heard and have added to their store of knowledge. Therefore, how do the countries visited during these voyages not deserve to be presented by those who grasp the tablets?²⁹

TAY HANH KIEN VAN KY LUOC (ACCOUNTS OF JOURNEY TO THE WEST)

Ly Van Phuc (1785 - 1849) was a distinguished poet and a Vietnamese diplomat in the midst of 19th century. He was of Minh Huong (usually translated as 'Ming Loyalists')

²⁵ DNTLCB, 157.

²⁶ Alexander, B. Woodside (1988). *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University. p. 118-119.

²⁷ Yu Xiang Dong (2012). *Xifang ruqin qianxi yuenan ruanchao de 'waiyang gongwu'* (The Vietnamese Emissaries on the Eve of Western Invasion during Nguyen Dynasty). *Historical Research Journal*. (1): 128.

²⁸ HTCL, p.177.

²⁹ HTCL, p. 177.



descendants, the sixth generation who have lived in Vietnam because his ancestors came from the region of Longxi in Zhangzhou in the Fujian province. During the reign of Gia Long, he served as an officer in the Hanlin Academy. At the same time, he had the experience working at the Six Board such as the Custom & Ceremony, Military Affairs and Public Works. In addition, he has also been posted in Quang Ngai Province and Quang Nam Province. During the years 1830-1840, he was ordered by Minh Mang and Thieu Tri (1841 – 1847) to visits countries such as South Asia, Southeast Asia, and even China. As a result of eleven missions of his visits to these countries, he had the opportunity to write approximately ten anthologies of poetry and travel diaries on every observation, reflection and experience of the countries' socio-economy and way of life.³⁰ Many of his accounts were recorded in *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ky Luoc* (Accounts of Journey to the West).³¹ On the voyage, two vessels were ordered to ensure the success of the mission. However, it was only *Fen Peng Hao's* vessel that succeeded the turbulent waves of the South China Sea to continue sailing towards India. The other vessel was forced to anchor at Cuo Han (Danang) to be repaired as the big waves have damaged the ship.³² Thus, Ly Van Phuc had to take precaution and take advantage of the change in the monsoon wind for a stopover in the Straits of Singapore, Penang and Malacca in 1830 before continuing his journey to Calcutta, India. During his brief stopover, he had the opportunity to sketch and record all the climate change, clothes, eating habits, literary works, customs, time, transportation, use of coins, local produce and others in *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ky Luoc*.³³ Ly Van Phuc clearly states that during his mission to the west he wrote three kinds of texts; the first being precisely such a travel diary he called *Tay hanh nhat trinh* (Dairy of a Journey to the West), the second entitled *Tay hannah kien van ki luoc* (Summary Record of What was Seen and Heard during a Journey to the West) which constitutes an extensive report on the countries he viusited, especially Calcutta and the third, known under different titles, among which that of *Tay hanh thi luoc* (appended to his Summary record). Obviously, Ly Van Phuc had reached the conclusion when he wrote that he gave his account the title of *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ky Luoc* (Accounts of Journey to the West), so that it may contribute to the geographical investigation.

A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS

In the meantime, during Ly Van Phuc's visit to the countries in the archipelago especially Penang and Singapore, the administration in Penang was undergoing transformation due to the economic downturn. This is because the trades in Penang did not develop as expected by the East India Company.³⁴ Penang is situated too far north from the spice route and tin producing regions in the Malay Archipelago. Hence, it limits the trades

³⁰ DNTLCB, 75 (Ly Van Phuc Chuan (Bibliography).

³¹ THKVKL, p. 3a.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ English East India Company was officially founded in 1600 by a royal charter. During some three hundred and fifty years of its existence it not only proved to be the greatest of the joint-stock companies engaged in foreign trade but also a valuable instrument in the creation of English colonial and imperial system. See K. N. Chaudhuri (1995). *The Study of an Early Joint-stock Company 1600-1640*. London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press 1911, p.3.



only to the areas around the island. Therefore, Penang was not a suitable centre for collection of trade products from South East Asia. In terms of administration, the expense to administrate Penang was higher than the income from trades. There were too many officials on the island and most were highly paid.³⁵

Ly Van Phuc, for instance also stated that Penang was once colonized by the Javanese before it was captured by the British.³⁶ However, the state that Ly Van Phuc meant as *Trao-Oa* or *Do-ba* referred to the old Kedah Kingdom which gave Penang to Francis Light in 1786. Over the years, the Vietnamese often use general terms such as *Cha-Va*, *Trao-Oa* or *Do-ba*, which refers to the Java (Malay) or the government of the Malay Archipelago.³⁷ Although the history of Vietnam noted that the relation has been long standing, the record of Vietnam's court officials is still confused as to the real position and difference of every state in the Malay Archipelago. This is because of the closed door policy which has been practised for a very long time, restricted trade activities with any outside parties other than those within Vietnam's tributary orbit. In contrast, to the common perception in the West is that the archipelago is the most exotic and most furthest located at the end of the world between China and India. The elements of economy are very important in the history of Western power presence in the region. The objective and economic factors became the reason for colonization especially since the era of Spanish-Portuguese Conquista in the 15th century to 16th century up to the age of plantations established in 1601 by a number of traders in London and the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* - VOC) in 1602 in the Netherlands.³⁸

In contrast, the economic and trade situation is entirely different in Singapore. The Singapore in Ly Van Phuc's observation was a busy harbour managed by the British.³⁹ Under the administrative of Major-General William Farquhar, Singapore thrived. William Farquhar was appointed by the first Resident of Singapore on 7 February 1819 and Singapore's Commandant since 1819 to 1823. William Farquhar introduced the free-trade system or also known as *laissez-faire*. He developed the north-east bank of the Singapore River into a thriving cosmopolitan city and Singapore is emerged as a central collector and distributor that work for merchandise from Southeast Asia. British traders stop over at Singapore on their way to China. Many merchants from the Malay Archipelago and the West came to Singapore and helped the port to increase its trade. By 1822, Singapore became significant especially when Stamford Raffles declared it as a free port. Ly Van Phuc had the chance to visit Singapore and Penang on his journey to India.⁴⁰ While Phan Huy Chu only saw Singapore before assigning the mission to Batavia in 1832.

According to Ly Van Phuc observation, Singapore was originally a protectorate to *Trao-oa Quoc* (Java).⁴¹ The confusion arises perhaps because they saw the direction of the

³⁵ C.M. Turnbull. (2002). “Penang's Changing Role in the Straits Settlements, 1826 -1946.” *The Penang Story*. International Conference 2002, 18-21 April 2002. The City Bayview Hotel, Penang, Malaysia. Organisers: The Penang Heritage Trust & STAR Publications, p. 15.

³⁶ *THKVKL*, p. 3a.

³⁷ Nguyen The Anh, 1996, p. 119.

³⁸ Robert Parthesius (2010), *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters: The Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia 1595-1660*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 31-35.

³⁹ *THKVKL*, p. 3a. See also C. D. Cowan. ed. (1950). *Early Penang & the rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the Manuscript Records of the East India Company*. Singapore: Malaya Publisher House.

⁴⁰ *THKVKL*, p. 3b.

⁴¹ *THKVKL*, p. 3b.



instructions issued by Stamford Raffles who was Lieutenant Governor of Java and Bengkulu Governor to William Farquhar in Singapore. The British succeeded to conquer the Javanese Island in 1811 as a result of Stamford Raffles attack under the directive of Lord Minto, the British Governor General in India. As a Governor in Bengkulu, Raffles has the power to monitor the administration of the Government of Singapore and may intervene in the administration.⁴²

Meantime, Ly Van Phuc also stated that the British has taken over Singapore 19 years prior to 1830, since 1811. Although there was inaccuracy in the facts as British only took over in 1819 and not 1811, the error occurred because Ly Van Phuc was said to have referred to a calendar used by a Chinese merchant in Singapore.

When I arrived Singapore, I saw in a Chinese shop some public notice, on one of these it was written: “British year: 1829, and just after Qing year: Emperor Daogong 9th, which coincides precisely with the 10th year of the Minh Mang era of our [Nguyen] dynasty, that is the year *ki suu*.”⁴³

Nevertheless, both of them make almost similar observation on the harbour of Singapore. Phan recorded that Singapore was more developed compared to Batavia, as evidenced by larger numbers of trading ships, population, and houses. Phan Huy Chu who arrived in Singapore almost three years later also noticed the importance of this harbour saying,

Along the river, the shops are contiguous, and the merchants live in this district. The harbour [Singapore] is crowded with foreign ships, and there is great traffic of commodities. This is really a prosperous place beyond the seas.⁴⁴

In sum, both of them were also struck by the appearance of the urban structure and noted that the British have built up these streets and quays so that the place has become a harbour city. On the other hand, the houses of the Dutch were also beautifully designed, but they do not have book collection. Indeed, opium houses, and opera houses were often seen in where the Chinese resided. Phan Huy Chu believed that this was the down side of Western colonization although he agreed to the manner simplicity practiced by the Westerners.⁴⁵

Ly Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chi also narrated that the administrative system in Straits Settlements were well organized. In Ly Van Phuc observation, he stated that each state has its own leader (Governor) and the leader of Penang was seen to have more power compared to the leaders in Malacca and Singapore.⁴⁶ However, the Penang leader still abides to the orders from the leader (President) in Ming-ga (Bengal). This is because the Presidents of the Straits Settlement depend mostly on the orders of the President in Bengal with its headquarters in Calcutta, India.

During his visit, Robert Fullerton was the first governor for Penang. He was elected as the first governor in the Straits Settlement, with the headquarters in Penang from November 27, 1826 to November 12, 1829. Incidentally, during Ly Van Phuc’s arrival in

⁴² Nicholas, Tarling (1962). *Anglo-Dutch Rivalry in the Malay World, 1780-1824*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 81.

⁴³ *THKVKL*, p. 3a.

⁴⁴ *HTCL*, p. 186.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *THKVKL*, p.3a.



Penang, the administration of East India Company in Penang was hit by a severe financial crisis due to the company's economic gloom in India. As a result of that, the Presidency of the Straits Settlements was abolished and the Straits Settlements were reduced to the state of the Residency depicted on the Presidency of Bengal based in Calcutta.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, at the time of Ly Van Phuc's visit to Singapore, he stated that the administration is equipped with advance technology specifically in terms of defence. His records, *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ki Luoc* has elaborated that Singapore's defence system is equipped with war ships and artillery such as a modern canon. He also had the opportunity to participate in military defence training during his stop in Singapore. Binh Bo (Secretary of War) in Singapore, according to Ly Van Phuc, implemented the military command of the military leader (Governor-General) in Calcutta, India.⁴⁸ Through the series of his visits to the Straits Settlement, Ly Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chi also depicted the advancement of science and technology of the West; from the speed rail system, the water mills, and steamship facilities to the imposing buildings. Everything depicted the fineness and height of Western civilization. However, in their writings, Ly Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chi still upheld the customs and ethics of the people in the states.⁴⁹

They saw the original occupants of this Straits Settlement should not view themselves as inferior or less advanced than the West and had to bow to their dictates. From Phan Huy Chu point of view, he seem to be sympathetic with the plights of the Do-ba, due to the Do-ba were conquered by the English for a few hundred years and had to live under British laws and pay taxes.⁵⁰ Even though these local people as referring as Do-ba by both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu, attempted to resist Western rule, they were too weak and had to bow to the rule of the Westerners.⁵¹ They also mentioned the West was scheming vagrants, full of hoaxes, arrogant and impolite compare to the Do-ba as well-mannered and soft-spoken. The differences in appearance and behaviour between the ‘Red Hairs’ and the Do-ba:-

The Red Hairs have scarlet hair, dragon whiskers, big noses, and sunken eyes – appearances that are quite detestable. As for the Do-ba, although their skin and faces are black, in appearance they are otherwise no different from the people of our own country. In general, the majority of Red Hairs are aggressive and crafty, while the Do-ba are simple and docile.⁵²

He also found that, apart from being darker in complexion, Do-ba were no different from the Vietnamese. He also briefly described the Do-ba's costume, which according to him, “The Do-ba people wore long and loose fitted gowns made from colored clothing with prominently red and blue.”⁵³

⁴⁷ The Straits Settlements becomes a residency – Singapore History, History SG, An Online Resources Guide via <<http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/bd541c73-58ef-4bb1-9de7-173f00913286#>>, date accessed 27/8/2016.

⁴⁸ *THKVKL*, p. 3a.

⁴⁹ *HTCL*, p. 186 and *THKVKL*, p. 3a.

⁵⁰ *HTCL*, p. 186.

⁵¹ *HTCL*, p. 32b-33a.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *HTCL*, p. 32b.



A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF BATAVIA [JAKARTA]

Phan Huy Chu has written several valuable insights of the original inhabitants of Java although most of the reports were narrated to the European and Chinese. His mission was to find out and investigate the European's activities in the Malay Archipelago. Indeed, his journey is to pay closer attention to the topographical details of the landscape and social and political situation in Batavia. From the brief biographical sketch, it is clear that Phan Huy Chu was a scholar who tried to clear his name before he decided to retire. Thus, Phan Huy Chu captured it through historical narrative which had described the Westerner negatively such as the Western political power, and the difference between the two different cultures (Salmon, 2009: 3). Hence, in documenting the observation and reflection, he was seen as being objective in sketching the facts of their journey but were subjective when commenting on his experience.⁵⁴

The duration of Phan Huy Chu's visit to Batavia was a time of transition from various aspects that have taken place in the Batavia, Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea. China has been sought after by the Western powers in their quest to conquer these countries. The concept of multiracial society which was led by Jean Gelman Taylor (2009: 3) in his observation on the Batavian society was increasing rapidly. There were many incidences which happened in Java such as the Java War (1825-1830) which marked a turning point between the era of trade since the East India British Company (EIC) and Java's search of identity in their comparison with the West.

However, in Phan Huy Chi's record, he described the socio cultural relation between the Chinese and the Dutch as living separately. Both had aspects of administration that were separate and different compared to the Java and the Chinese who were seen more friendly and unified. Although the Dutch were more advance and sophisticated than the Chinese, in Phan's opinion, the Dutch did not practice the teachings of Emperor Zhou as well as practising Confucius' way of life. Phan seemed to think that the Westerners were more impolite and scary looking. The dietary habit of Westerners was also well described. Phan realized that the westerners enjoyed gathering, did not use chopstick, preferred sugary foods, cold foods, and meats. Thus, Phan perceived that the Dutch/ English have not changed from their barbaric ways. This to Phan, was a great fault, leading him to conclude that,

They [the Dutch] do not know the teachings of Chu [the Chou kings of Chinese antiquity] and Khong [Confucius] and therefore, although they [the Dutch] may be skilful at many different things, they are still barbarians.⁵⁵

To sum up, Phan Huy Chu description about the Westerners (Dutch) had clearly indicated that he discriminated the Westerners and felt closer to the locals who looked more familiar to the Vietnamese (Salmon, 2009 :3-4). Even the market in Batavia were generally filled with an abundance of the same goods found in Vietnam. However, with all of its fresh produce, Batavia was still lacking in some respects according to Phan Huy Chu's observation.

⁵⁴ Liam, C. Kelley. (1998). “Batavia through the Eyes of Vietnamese Envoys.” *Explorations: A Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 2 (1): 2.

⁵⁵ HTCL, p.187.



CONCLUSION

Travel accounts have long enable scholars of Southeast Asia to glean data on the customs, daily life and habitat of pre-modern Southeast Asians. The records by Phan Huy Chut and Ly Van Phuc to Malay Archipelago such as Batavia, Penang and Singapore as collected in an anthology of poems and diaries of their voyage, gave enlightenment to the palace of Vietnam about the Malay Archipelago. The both texts of *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ki Luoc* and *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc*, provided insights into the new manner the Vietnam were looking at the Malay Archipelago, at least from the way they were looking at the Straits Settlement people's culture, history, daily life and socio cultural. They were fully conversant with information of patterns and recent development specifically the political system and administration of British and the Dutch. Their opinion and their vast travel experience clear that both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu represent a new phase in the Vietnamese' understanding of Malay Archipelago. Greater efforts were made to observe things they saw, culminating in some very detailed information from different perspective especially on the geographical and cultural interaction between Vietnam and Malay Archipelago. To be sure, such works are not free of their own biases due to influence of the Chinese World-view exerted on their imaginations.

Nevertheless, they can provide us with a valuable picture of how the world was viewed from specific places. Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu both believed that the identity of those from the Malay Archipelago must be preserved. High culture and great progress achieved by the West especially in the technological knowledge is not necessarily in keeping with the traditions and culture of the people and the community in the Malay Archipelago. The rejection of culture and way of life of the West was due to the influence of these scholars who uses Confucian ideas. In addition, it also revealed their inner conflicts when others admire the science and technology but rejected the Western lifestyle. In truth, the mission to send out for the court officials by Emperor Minh Mang to track information regarding the aspects of administration and Western politics on their conquered land was successful. However, the conservative minds of the officials were still bound by the obsession towards Confucius idea. Vietnam eventually fell to the French for not practising more progressive reforms, gained through visits by the scholars to the Malay Archipelago.

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